



LISLE, ILLINOIS

MORTON ARBORETUM

JOY MORTON · FOUNDER

BULLETIN OF POPULAR INFORMATION

SOME LOW AND MEDIUM HEIGHT SHRUBS WHICH BEAR WATCHING

With the landscape need for low or moderate growing shrubs becoming ever more urgent, nurserymen and landscape architects alike have intensified their search for worthy subjects to meet current planting requirements. Recognizing this interest, The Morton Arboretum along with other plant experimental institutions, has for some time been on the alert for new or little known compact growers, ornamentally desirable and tolerant of the climatic and soil conditions of the areas in which they are to be used.

One of the most promising subjects in the Morton Arboretum collection at the present time is a compact Buckhorn (*Rhamnus*) notable for its dense habit and regularity of contour. Originating from seed of the Lebanon Buckthorn, *Rhamnus libanotica*, received from the Munden, Germany Botanic Garden in March, 1926, this chance seedling, the dwarfest of six plants to germinate, showed its distinctive character almost from the first. And, while the height range of the other seedlings varies from 7 to 15 feet, the original selection remains the lowest and most uniformly globular. Grafts of it made fifteen years ago are still less than 4 feet in height, stout, erectly branched bushes with grayish twigs and prominently pointed purplish brown buds. The medium sized leaves average about 1½ inches in length, are ovate to suborbicular in shape, evenly serrate and of rather leathery texture. Their good dark green coloring is retained until late fall. While not outstanding, the autumn fruit display of ¼ inch berries is representative of the genus.

In view of the uncertainties involved in raising woody plants from seed, especially when the source is a botanical collection in which the possibility of natural hybridization exists, the authenticity of plants so grown is always questionable. In the case of this *Rhamnus libanotica* seedling, the native habitat of the species raises further doubt as to whether or not it is authentic botanically. Being indigenous to Lebanon and Syria, its hardiness

in more northern zones is doubtful. The fact remains, however, that this seedling is a good landscape plant with qualities insuring its popularity once it becomes known and available.

In the same height category is an American Cranberrybush Viburnum selection, a plant of which was acquired in 1953 from the Henry Kohankie Nursery of Painesville, Ohio. According to information furnished by Mr. Kohankie, *Viburnum trilobum compactum*, as the plant was designated, is a variant which he discovered about 1925 in a block of three year seedlings of the type species. Attracting considerable attention because of its compact form, moderate growth rate and good foliage, it was propagated extensively for landscape use. And, although Mr. Kohankie has no data as to the plants ultimate height, due to the fact that his stock in the nursery was always depleted before reaching five feet, he surmised it might possibly double this size eventually. Being slower growing, of course, its lower stature would be retained considerably longer than similar aged plants of the type species. No records are available as to its flowering and fruiting characteristics, other than the fact that nursery plants had never blossomed nor borne fruit. It is assumed there would be little variation from the attractive white flower clusters and showy red fruit typifying "*trilobum*."

Of the various dwarf shrubs currently being tested at the Arboretum none is being watched more closely than the Dwarf Fragrant Viburnum, *Viburnum fragrans nanum*, a choice variety received from W. B. Clarke & Co. nurseryman of San Jose, California in 1950. As the illustration indicates, the plant is low growing and extremely compact with typical



The Dwarf Fragrant Viburnum, *Viburnum fragrans nanum*.

"*fragrans*" foliage of normal size and coloring. While the leaves may appear slightly out of scale in relation to the plants present stature it is felt this situation will ultimately correct itself. Information is lacking as to the eventual height of this dwarf Viburnum, but no pronounced increase is anticipated on the basis of the slight growth made since our plant was originally set out. It now measures only 18 inches. When, if ever, it will flower is also an uncertainty. The floral display of the type plant is, of course, its outstanding attraction, the pink or white blossoms being known for their distinctive fragrance.

The Kohankie firm was also the source of the Pygmy Border Privet, *Ligustrum obtusifolium nanum* (syn. *ibota nanum*), a lower growing though not dwarf variety of the familiar Ibota Privet from Japan. This slender branched variation is said to have a maximum height of 6 feet, a fact borne out by the growth of twenty five 18 to 24 inch plants set out in the Arboretum in 1941. Fifteen years later not one of them has exceeded this figure. Of reasonably compact habit and fine textured appearance, this Privet has typical small dark green leaves which turn purplish in autumn, and small, dark blue fruits with a pronounced bloom. The latter occur in small clusters, ripening in the fall and often clinging throughout the winter.

Another privet under observation, and one which may eventually prove a welcome substitute for the blight susceptible Lodense Privet, is a dwarf seedling selection discovered some 14 years ago by Mr. H. Roy Mosnat of Belle Plaine, Iowa. Although similar in appearance to *Ligustrum vulgare nanum* in height, density and habit of growth, its persistent foliage is more like that of Regal Privet both in size, shape and coloring. The fact that the original plants have remained about 30 inches tall without pruning is an indication of its value as a hedge material or as a low shrub for general landscaping. Its hardiness has been established as far north as the Minneapolis St. Paul area and it has never shown any indication of being troubled by blight. Having never flowered or fruited, its botanical identity is still undetermined, and for the time being it is still listed in our files under the name *Ligustrum Mosnat Dwarf Type*.

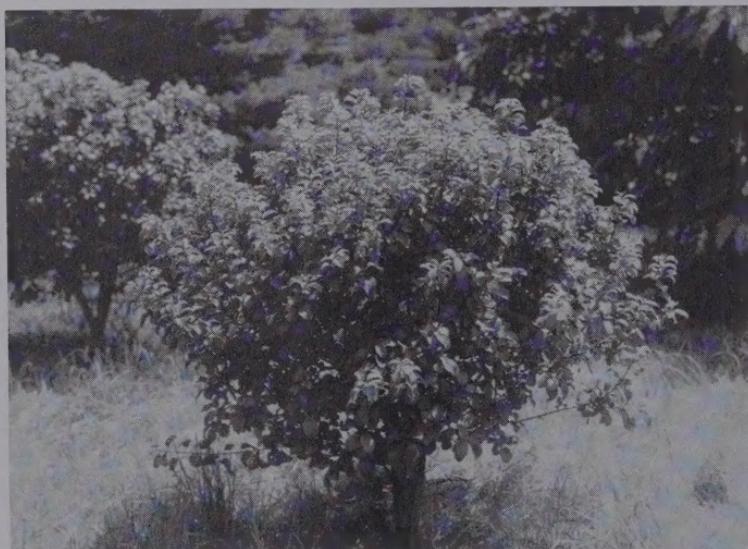
There is promise, too, in a dwarf Mulberry variation, *Morus rubra* dwarf type, which originated at Michigan State University. While little information can be gained about the plant from the small grafts representing it in our collection, notes on older specimens indicate its most unusual feature to be its exceptional width in relationship to its height. Westcroft Gardens of Grosse Ile, Michigan, for example, report having an 8 year plant only 18 inches high, but with a spread of 3½ feet. The hedging possibilities of such a plant would seem obvious.

The versatile Euonymus clan comprises shrubs to meet almost any requirement. And, among the lower growers should be mentioned the Dwarf European Euonymus, *Euonymus europaea nana*, an older, but little

known dwarf form growing to 3 or 4 feet. A reduced scale version of the type species, this upright branched shrub exhibits the same compactness of habit, a twiggy texture and similar dark green foliage. The Arboretum has only small plants.

Since its introduction by the Arnold Arboretum in 1941, *Forsythia* "Arnold Dwarf," an "*intermedia*" x "*japonica*" hybrid of unique habit, has been enthusiastically received by landscape architect and home gardener alike. For, unlike other Goldenbells, this one grows no taller than 2 feet, forming an excellent broad-spreading ground cover with drooping branches and fine textured light green foliage. One shortcoming which to some detracts from its rating as an ornamental is the absence of flowers, an imperfection difficult to reconcile in a genus renowned for its cheery yellow bloom. The recent discovery of a flowering strain, however, soon promises to correct this situation.

E. L. Kammerer



A grafted plant of a selected Lebanon Buckthorn seedling (*Rhamnus libanotica* — Boiss.) made fifteen years ago.

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